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SUBJECT: EXTREMISTS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS IN EP ELECTIONS

Classified By: Acting P/E Counselor Jon Martinson, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (U) Summary. With a 36 percent turnout for the June 7 European Parliamentary (EP) elections, Hungarian voters turned even further right than expected. Although the largest opposition party FIDESZ won the majority of seats (14 of 22) as predicted, the extreme-right Jobbik party, winning 15 percent of the vote, will send three representatives to the EP. The Socialists (MSzP) earned only four seats, while the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) once again defied pollsters predictions, winning one seat. The Free Democrats (SzDSz) finished sixth out of eight parties on the voting list, and, as a result of their poor showing, party President Gabor Fodor has offered to resign. Jobbik's stronger than anticipated showing challenges FIDESZ's role as sole competitor for the conservative, populist, nationalist vote in Hungary. End summary.

FIDESZ: Remarkable Victory But...

12. (SBU) With 56 percent of the votes, the opposition party FIDESZ will fill 14 of the 22 seats allocated to Hungary in the EP. Although FIDESZ gains an additional five seats in the EP, this is slightly less than most polling companies predicted. The results suggest that the most radical FIDESZ supporters switched their support to Jobbik. In a post-election speech, FIDESZ President Viktor Orban stressed that the election results' clearly demand that the MSzP "get out of the way of change." He reiterated that "Hungarians will have a significant presence in Brussels representing the Carpathian basin." Orban's comments on ethnic Hungarian successes in the EU elections in neighboring Slovakia and Romania are a continuation of his controversial statements referring to ethnic Hungarian representatives in the EP who will look out for the interests of all Hungarians in the Carpathian basin (septel). Interestingly, unlike other Hungarian political party leaders, Orban refrained from commenting on Jobbik's success, and it remains to be seen what strategy Orban and FIDESZ will develop to handle the new player in the political wing. The majority of FIDESZ's EP representatives are returning MEPs but new faces include former House Speaker Janos Ader and Orban's former Chief of Cabinet, Tamas Deutch.

MSzP A poor showing, as expected

13. (SBU) The governing Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) registered its weakest showing in post-communist elections, garnering only 17 percent of the vote. They will send four representatives to the EP, less than half of the nine seats they currently hold in Brussels. MSzP's poor showing reflects most pre-election surveys, suggesting a significant

.decrease in support among Hungarian voters. However, at an election night rally, Party President Ildiko Lendvai emphasized the MSzP would continue governing the country, leading it "on the road toward economic stabilization." She also warned of the danger far-right Jobbik poses for Hungary.

Election results indicate a significant shrinkage of MSzP's traditional base, and in a striking reflection of Jobbik's appeal, in seven of the 19 counties, primarily in eastern Hungary with a larger Roma minority population, MSzP ran third behind Jobbik. Former Foreign Minister Kinga Góncz will lead the reduced MSzP representation in Brussels.

And the big winner is - JOBBIK

¶4. (SBU) The non-parliamentary far-right Jobbik party is the big winner in the elections, earning 15 percent voter support and three EP representatives, well exceeding all forecasts. The party's main campaign themes, "Hungary for Hungarians" and combating the "growing gypsy crime" resonated with many voters, in particular, as noted above, in the eastern counties of Hungary. In his euphoric post-election statement, Party President Gabor Vona spared no effort in challenging the current Bajnai government, threatening street demonstrations to demand early elections. In addition to the well-known radical, and former Fulbright Scholar, Krisztina Morvai, Zoltan Balczo, former vice president of the far-right Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP), and Csanad Szegedi, one of the organizers of Magyar Garda (Hungarian Guard) will represent Jobbik in Brussels.

And the big loser is - SzDSz

¶5. (SBU) With only 2.2 percent of the votes, the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) lost their two seats in the EU Parliament. Voters punished SzDSz's for their flip-flopping strategies over the past year, as they first quit the government coalition with the MSzP and then lined up behind the current Bajnai government. Clearly, their main campaign focus on combating extremists did not resonate well with the population. Party President Gabor Fodor offered his resignation after the election and the party's Board of Executives will make a decision whether to accept it later today.

A resuscitated MDF?

¶6. (SBU) Contrary to all predictions, the Hungarian Democratic Forum once again exceeded the required five percent threshold and will maintain their one representative in Brussels. Celebrating the unexpected success, Party President Ibolya David criticized both the MSzP and FIDESZ, stating that "the demagoguery of the two big parties significantly contributed to the popularity of the far-right Jobbik party." The MDF, currently without a parliamentary faction in the Hungarian Parliament, will send Lajos Bokros, a renowned economist and former socialist finance minister to Brussels.

¶7. (C) Comment. With a 36 percent voter turnout (two percent less than in 2004), Hungary still did better than several of its neighbors, and the success of the extreme-right Jobbik party is consistent with voting trends in other European countries. While Hungarian national elections officially are less than a year away - but may come sooner - the EU elections will certainly have an impact on Hungary's domestic political life. Orban's "one-camp, one flag" appeal to conservative voters once again proved untrue and FIDESZ now has to reckon with a new force legitimately emerging from the right wing of the Hungarian political theater. Although not unexpected, the devastating defeat of the Socialists may shake the Bajnai Government's support from the Socialist "hinterland." As for SzDSz, they have a very dark political

future, and the internal struggle for party leadership, with former party president Janos Koka a key player, may prove to be a fatal blow. The party's poor performance does not bode well for SzDSz in the next general elections, if the party even survives. While the MDF stepped across the five percent threshold, this does not eliminate, only momentarily sidelines, in-party conflicts. Embassy contacts tell us that Bokros will resign from his EP position, allowing Gyorgy Hapsburg, grandson of the last Hungarian King, and number two on their EP election party list, to represent them in Brussels. Our contacts suggest that Bokros will then take over the MDF party leadership in the near future.

18. (C) Comment continued. Jobbik's success, well surpassing every expectation, will have a significant impact on Hungarian politics. The EU election may well be the springboard for the far-right party's potential success in the upcoming national elections. Although an anticipated larger voter turnout and two-tiered electoral system may diminish Jobbik's success in parliamentary elections, the more than 400,000 voters they mobilized for the EP elections would put them over the five percent threshold required for national elections as well. Their anti-Semitic and anti-Roma rhetoric is a warning sign and it remains to be seen as to how and/or if the current Hungarian parliamentary parties will cooperate to counter this disturbing rise in extremism.
Levine